



STORIES OF RESILIENCE PROJECT REPORT

February 2020

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BACKGROUND AND INTRODUCTION

On Thursday 10 May and Friday 11 May 2018 the greater Hobart region was affected by extreme weather that brought heavy rains, extreme winds and flooding. This weather event adversely affected a number of people, their residences and/or businesses across the region.

The City of Hobart wanted to gather information and stories about the impact of the weather event. The Stories of Resilience Project engaged with people directly impacted by the May 2018 floods to learn about their experiences and apply their lessons to future local government resilience work and support individual and community preparedness for future disasters and emergencies.

To pursue the project the City of Hobart partnered with other municipalities in the greater Hobart area including:

- Glenorchy City Council
- Kingborough Council

The City of Hobart sought and obtained funding through the Community Recovery and Resilience Grants Program. This funding enabled a consultant to be engaged to interview community members affected by the extreme weather event. As a result of these interviews a number of audio recordings were compiled, a short video and a series of photographic images of participants. These outputs have been made available publicly to serve as a historical record and raise awareness of the impact of the May 2018 event.

THE EXTREME WEATHER EVENT

Late on Thursday 10 May 2018 Tasmania experienced an extreme weather event, with damaging south to south-easterly winds and heavy rainfall. More than 120mm of rain fell in Hobart and surrounding suburbs – the wettest Hobart day since 1960 and the second highest recorded May rainfall in a single day for Tasmania. The Bureau of Meteorology reported that by Friday morning, kunanyi / Mount Wellington had recorded 236mm, the highest rainfall ever recorded on the mountain.

The extreme weather caused considerable damage across Southern Tasmania. The most heavily impacted local government areas were Hobart, Derwent Valley, Glenorchy, Clarence, Huon Valley and Kingborough.

During the storm, between 12,000 and 15,000 homes lost power and flash flooding caused a number of motor vehicles to be swept down streets. The State Emergency Service reported more than 400 calls for assistance, with an additional 110 requests reported by Tasmania Fire Service.

PROJECT OBJECTIVES

The main purpose of the Stories of Resilience project was to gather stories from people who were affected by the extreme weather event in May 2018. These stories will enable both the story-tellers and others to learn from the experience. The stories will raise community awareness about what it was like to experience and recover from the extreme weather event. The project will provide information about disaster planning and preparedness and assist local governments to improve their services and support to the community.

A project of this type is particularly useful for local government entities as municipal councils provide a range of services related to disaster preparedness, response and recovery, including:

- Protecting council-owned infrastructure and assets
- Managing risk registers to ensure continuity of services
- Managing community evacuation and recovery centres
- Coordinating with government and non-government entities

The Stories of Resilience Project had a number of key objectives, including to:

- Provide affected community members from Hobart City, Glenorchy City, Derwent Valley and Kingborough local government areas with an opportunity to share their experiences and lessons learned from the Southern Tasmania Extreme Weather Event
- Create a meaningful collaboration between regional councils
- Create a meaningful collaboration between local government, local artists and community members
- Generate data about disaster experiences and community resilience in affected areas
- Record these experiences for posterity and awareness raising
- Raise awareness of disaster planning and preparedness among community members

PROJECT OUTPUTS

To achieve the project objectives a number of outputs were produced, including:

- eight (8) short audio recordings (published as podcasts)
- one (1) video recording
- a series of photographic images of project participants/interviewees
- a launch of the audio and visual stories on the Friday 6 December 2019 at Wide Angle Tasmania at 6 Washington Street, South Hobart.
- the creation of a website to host the audio and visual content produced from project
- this short project report which outlines the project methodology and identifies key themes following the analysis of the qualitative data obtained from all of the participant interviews.

COMMUNITY RESILIENCE

Community resilience is an appealing concept, as it denotes the capacity of something or someone to cope when confronted by hardship - to bounce back, recover and return to normal after grappling with an unusual, distressing and often unanticipated (or unexpectedly severe) threat (Bonnano, 2005; Cutter et al., 2008; Maguire & Cartwright, 2008; McAslan, 2010, 2011; Tanner, Mitchell, Polack, & Guenther, 2009).

Community resilience can be explored in a number of ways, including the strength of relationships across sectors and groups within the community, and the effects of government policy decisions. However, despite the obvious appeal of the idea of community resilience, it is an abstract concept that can be hard to define and can be difficult for practitioners and policy-makers to translate into concrete actions or policies.

The City of Hobart Capital City Strategic Plan 2019-29 (2019) defines resilience as the capacity of individuals, communities, institutions, businesses and systems to survive, adapt and thrive in the face of adversity, trauma, tragedy, threats or significant stress. The City of Hobart publication, *A Community Vision For Our Island Capital* (2018) observes that “We help other in the best and worst of times, and we flourish in the face of hardship.” This capacity for resilience as a strong identifying characteristic of Hobart’s population was reflected in the Vision document in the following way:

Hobart’s isolation and scale have required resilience. We know that the future challenges will demand that we work together. But we are our best selves in times of adversity and vulnerability. We are caring, helpful and supportive of everyone at all times but especially when things get tough.

The National Strategy for Disaster Resilience (National Emergency Management Committee, 2009) includes the following four, core features in its description of a resilient community:

- functioning well while under stress
- successful adaptation
- self reliance
- social capacity.

Therefore, a resilient community is one whose members are connected to one another and work together in ways that enable it to function in the face of stress and trauma. A resilient community has the ability to adapt to changes in the physical, social or economic environment, and the potential to learn from experience and improve over time. A resilient community can also be self-sufficient, at least for a time, if external assistance is limited or delayed. As Maguire and Cartwright aptly summarised: the essence of community resilience is the ability to "utilise community resources to transform and respond to change in an adaptive way" (2008, p. 8).

Community resilience is dependent, at least in part, on there being a large number of resilient individuals and families within the community. When there are high levels of both individual and familial responsibility, the community is better placed to respond quickly and effectively to challenging situations.

Communities that are high in social capital are able to respond more effectively to difficult situations and emergencies (Maguire & Cartwright, 2008; McAslan, 2011; World Resources Institute, United Nations Environment Programme, & World Bank, 2008). Putnam (1995) defined social capital as "features of social organization such as networks, norms, and social trust that facilitate coordination and cooperation for mutual benefit" (p. 67).

When community members have an awareness of their community history they are able to learn from the successes and failures of the past by critically reflecting on events. An awareness of history also encourages a sense of local identity and allows people to see the "bigger picture" in times of hardship (Hegney et al., 2008; Maguire & Cartwright, 2008). Personal stories particularly humanise and memorialise significant events in a way that makes them accessible and relatable for others.

PROJECT METHODOLOGY

To address the objectives of the project it was necessary to gather in-depth information from a number of key respondents across the four local government areas.

Participant Recruitment

To facilitate participant recruitment a promotional flyer (Attachment 1) was developed for the project together with an expression of interest form (Attachment 2). The promotional flyer for the project provided a brief overview of the purpose of the project, who was appropriate to participate, how the project would be undertaken together with an email address to obtain further information about the project, and the contact details for the project manager.

A number of strategies and communication channels were used to recruit project participants, including:

- City of Hobart Facebook page
- Glenorchy City Council promotion (e.g. at Collinsvale Market)
- Kingborough Council promotion
- emails to community associations and key organisations known to have been affected by the weather event (i.e. Youth Arc, University of Tasmania)
- direct targeting of potential individual participants via email and telephone
- letter-box drop of project promotional materials in the South Hobart area (Degraeves Street)

Expressions of interest were principally obtained electronically via the form and online registration system. As part of the expression of interest process, potential participants provided informed consent to the City of Hobart authorising the use of their audio recordings and visual images in the compilation of their stories of resilience. The expression of interest form gathered key contact information for potential participants, the Local Government Area to which their story is connected, demographic information such as gender, age range and primary language spoken, an overview of their experience of the weather event and the identification of the parts of someone's life affected by the event (i.e. living, studying, business arrangements etc.)

Following the receipt of expressions of interest to participate in the project respondents were contacted to schedule suitable interview times with the consultants engaged to gather the stories and images.

Participant Profile

A total of twenty-one (21) people were interviewed as part of the project. Fourteen (14) of the participants were female and seven (7) were male. The participants either lived, worked or studied in one of the four municipalities involved in the project, with:

- one (1) participant from within the Glenorchy City Council area
- ten (10) participants from within the Hobart City Council area
- four (4) participants from the within the Derwent Valley Council area
- six (6) participants from within the Kingborough Council area.

Story Gathering

Helene Thomas, the founder of The Wayfinder Mobile Storytelling Studio was engaged by the City of Hobart to interview participants and compile their stories. The Wayfinder is a mobile studio designed and built in Tasmania. It is a professional sound booth with excellent sound proof acoustic insulation properties and has been carefully designed to be conducive to conversation and to make people feel comfortable and relaxed. Equipped with studio microphones and industry-standard recording equipment, The Wayfinder has been purpose-built for travelling around Tasmania and collecting stories. Helene has been producing audio features and documentaries for ABC Radio National for over ten years.

Her passion is crafting people's stories into beautiful audio experiences. It was through her PhD that Helene developed a slow journalism practice that she calls Journalism of the Heart. A practice that leads to a richer and more meaningful storytelling. Helene notes that:

Stories are important because they help us understand and empathise with people, places and situations that may be unfamiliar to us. Through hearing other people's stories, we realise we're not alone with our experiences. We make sense of the world, others and ourselves through stories.

To undertake the Stories of Resilience Project Helene Thomas collaborated with Eddie Safarik, a photographer and videographer. Eddie is a Walkley, Keith Welsh and Clarion award winning freelance photojournalist based in Kettering, Tasmania. Eddie's passion is presenting people, their stories and communicating through photographs, video, audio and written words. Having worked as a photographer for 30 years Eddie has contributed to various companies including The Sydney Morning Herald, The Age, The Australian, The Weekend Australian Magazine, Reuters and Agence France-Presse (AFP). He has covered many natural disasters during this time including the devastating 2011 Brisbane floods for an international audience through AFP and category 5, Cyclone Larry for the Australian and Weekend Australian Magazine where he was in the eye of the storm and continued to report its effects for the next several weeks. Eddie is continuing to work on assignments for commercial clients as well as an essential dedication to his personal projects.

Between February and May 2019 Helene Thomas and Eddie Safarik met with project participants to conduct their interviews and record footage and photographic images.

A series of questions was developed to guide the collection of responses from project participants. A copy of these questions is included in this report as Attachment 3.

ANALYSIS

To enable analysis of the qualitative data derived from the project the original and full audio recordings from each of the interviews conducted with the project participants were transcribed and the data was encoded for thematic analysis using MAXQDA.

Whilst there are some limitations in undertaking qualitative research through the analysis of narrative data there are strengths associated with the approach for this type of project, including:

- it provides a deep and rich level of information about the individual experiences and stories of individual project participants
- it is possible to discover and understand the events that impacted the lives of project participants
- It provides an opportunity to investigate or unravel complex social phenomena by looking for patterns and themes in the information provided by project participants.

Despite these strengths there are limitations that need to be considered in the conduct of qualitative research, including:

- interpretation and analysis of data is subjective and may be biased by the researcher/data analyst
- the relatively small sample size of project participants limits the conclusions that are able to be drawn
- the knowledge and insights gained may not be generalizable to the wider population.

KEY THEMES

The stories told by project participants were detailed and evocative. Some of the key themes that emerged from the data analysis include:

- The pace with which the flood unfolded
- How difficult it is to be prepared for unexpected events and natural disasters
- The significant extent of the damage to property and pets/livestock
- The time delays and complexity in relation to the recovery of loss and damage to property and possessions
- The physical and mental impacts of the event and the time that it takes to recover from trauma
- The level of kindness and support provided by family, friends and neighbours
- Gratitude that the floods didn't cause more harm or damage or didn't result in the loss of human life

Participants shared their experience of how the extreme weather event unfolded for them. Many participants revealed how quickly it became apparent that something significant was happening with the amount of rainfall and the flooding that was occurring. Over the course of a few hours the rain had caused flooding and damage to homes and gardens, businesses, cars, schools, and the university. For some people it was not until the following day and after sun had risen that the full extent of the damage was apparent.

Participant Quotation:

"...life is a constant change so I adapt fairly quickly and I think I did cope reasonably well under the circumstances but I certainly wasn't prepared for the magnitude of what happened."

Some participants highlighted the anxiety, fear and distress that they experienced during the event. For a small number of project participants the sound of heavy rainfall is still a source of anxiety. The once soothing sound of rain on a roof is now a cause for alarm or fear.

The aftermath of the storm brought with it the need to clean-up. For some project participants this involved working with family, friends, neighbours to remove and dispose of damaged and contaminated property. For some people this process was relatively straightforward whilst for others it involved complex and (often) protracted interactions with insurance providers to arrange the loss assessment and the coordination of tradespeople for repair work. During this period some project participants highlighted the need for their persistence as well as the need to keep moving forward to try to return things to a state prior to the storm. For some participants the unfolding months of recovery brought physical tiredness and mental stress as they juggled the normal requirements of day-to-day life as well as coordinating repair and recovery activities. For a number of people the physical and emotional toll remained long after the initial event, meanwhile those around them who were not impacted were just going about their normal lives.

Participant Quotation:

"It is the human element that comes to the fore and I wish we could bottle it and keep it all the time because there's a deep decency and kindness in all of us I think ... Most people do care and they do reach out when there's a problem all in different ways within their capacity."

Project participants highlighted the type and level of support that they received from family and friends and how enormously valuable that this was as an outward demonstration of care from others.

Some project participants experienced a high level of property loss or damage and for other participants the loss of pets and livestock was extremely distressing and upsetting. Whilst

Participant Quotation:
“You need to be prepared to lose things because I think when we have a major event like that you can only save yourself and your pets and your really important things. And I suppose not to place so much value on things.”

many project participants observed their gratitude that the storm had not resulted in the loss of any human life there were still stages of grief and loss relating to property loss and the death of beloved pets and animals.

Some participants highlighted the difficulty in being adequately prepared for a significant weather event or disaster; for both individuals and government agencies. A couple of participants referenced the value of being personally prepared by having an emergency kit or evacuation supplies. Other participants identified the value in a government authority preparing and distributing a recovery checklist of things to do and supports or services to contact following a significant event.

Participant Quotation:
“I think to have an emergency bag ready at all times”

Although Hobart and surrounds avoided any loss of human life in the 2018 it is important to consider infrastructure planning and disaster mitigation to maximise the safeguarding of significant infrastructure and equipping people to be adequately prepared to respond positively at a household and business level. An important lesson is the valuable role that government can play at all levels in communicating in a timely and accurate way to those impacted by significant events and disasters.

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ATTACHMENT 1: PROMOTIONAL FLYER



STORIES OF RESILIENCE

We are looking for people who:

- Have a direct experience of the 10–11 May 2018 weather event.
- Experienced lasting impacts from the event (i.e. beyond just 10–11 May)
- Live, work, study, own property and/or run a business in Hobart, Glenorchy, Kingborough or Derwent Valley local government areas.

Between February and May 2019, Helene Thomas owner of The Wayfinder, a mobile storytelling studio, will be speaking to people from across the Hobart region. We are inviting community members affected by the extreme weather event to tell their stories and help themselves and others learn from the experience. The project will raise community awareness about disaster planning, preparedness, response and recovery and help local governments improve their services.

For more information:

W hobartcity.com.au/storiesofresilience
E yazahmeidib@hobartcity.com.au
T 03 6238 2495

This project is funded by the Australian and Tasmanian governments under the Natural Disaster Relief and Recovery Arrangements.

For more information:

hobartcity.com.au/storiesofresilience



ATTACHMENT 2: EXPRESSION OF INTEREST FORM



Stories of Resilience: Community Flood Recovery through Storytelling

Pre-Interview Survey

1. Full name:
2. Email address:
3. Which Council area(s) does your story connect to?
 - Hobart
 - Kingborough
 - Glenorchy
 - Derwent Valley
4. Which suburb do you live in?
5. What is your gender? M F Do not identify as either
6. What is your age?
 - Under 18
 - 18-24
 - 25-34
 - 35-44
 - 45-54
 - 55-64
 - 65-74
 - 75-84
 - 85+
7. Do you own your own home?
 - Yes, I live in a property that I own
 - Yes, but I rent out the property that I own
 - No, I live in a rental property
 - No, I live with family or friends
 - Other (please specify)
8. What is the main language(s) you speak at home?
9. Which parts of your life did the event affect?
 - Where I live
 - Where I work or study
 - Property that I own
 - A business that I run
 - Other (please specify)



ATTACHMENT 3: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Where were you and what were you doing at the time of the May 2018 extreme weather event?

Can you describe the event the way you saw it unfolding at the time?

At what point did it start to look like something unusual was happening?

Can you describe what it felt like?

Who were you with at the time?

What did you do when you realised you or your property might be at risk of being harmed?

What impact did the floods have on you and your property?

What did you do immediately after the floods?

Has life returned to normal? Why or why not?

Did you give or receive help? Who and why?

What has been the financial and emotional cost of the event?

What has helped you or could help you recover?

During consultations between the council and citizens we have heard examples of how people in Hobart are 'our best selves' in disasters and emergencies. Did this feel true to you during the May event? Why or why not?

Did you feel adequately prepared? Why or why not?

How did you get information about what to do?

What lessons did you learn that you think everyone preparing for disasters should know?